



Analysis of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict from Edward Azar's Protracted Social Conflict Theory

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Abstract

One of the critical problems with liberal peace theory that has played the core role in global peacebuilding in both intellectual and practical terms is the belief in the ontological divide between the West and the non-West with the former superior to the latter. With such a divide, liberal peace has failed to incorporate the impacts of colonialism and global political dynamics into the conflict analysis. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been affected by colonialism and global political dynamics for the rise of conflict and protraction. We need a conflict-dynamics that integrates local, communal, national, global, and colonial perspectives. This research employs Edward Azar's Protracted Social Conflict theory to analyze the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The theory presents four variables that make conflict and war protracted. They are communal content and dynamics, basic human needs, governance, and international linkage or impact of global politics and colonial legacies on conflict. The employment of Azar's theory has allowed this research to develop a holistic view of conflict dynamics including the necessity to recognize the basic needs of both Palestinians and Israelis, the imperative to address asymmetric socio-political and economic relations between them, internal political division between both in Israel and Palestine and consequent difficulty to promote peace negotiations, and the significant impact of the remnant of colonial legacies and global and regional political dynamic on the protraction of conflict. With Azar's theoretical gaze,

the research concludes that more complex and holistic processes must be enacted than mere management of temporal cooperative events.

Keywords: Liberal Peace, Edward Azar, Protracted Social Conflict, Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, Holistic Peace

Introduction

This research will analyze the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from the perspectives of Edward Azar's Protracted Social Conflict. One of the critical problems with liberal peace that has played the core role in global peacebuilding in both intellectual and practical terms is the belief in the ontological divide between the West and the non-West with the former superior to the latter. With such a divide, liberal peace has failed to incorporate the impacts of colonialism and global political dynamics into the conflict analysis. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been affected by colonialism and global political dynamics for the rise of conflict and protraction. We need a conflict-dynamics that integrates local, communal, national, international, and colonial perspectives.

The first section will briefly examine the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The second section will critique the liberal peace thesis. The third section will delve into the analysis of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on Azar's Protracted Social Conflict. Azar proposes four (4) mutually connecting variables in understanding the protraction of conflict and war: i) communal content; ii) basic human needs; iii) asymmetric governance system that causes the failure to gratify physiological and psychological human needs; and iv) the impact of global political and economic dynamics and colonial legacies.

The employment of Azar's theory has allowed this research to develop a holistic view of conflict dynamics including the necessity to recognize the basic needs of both Palestinians and Israelis, the imperative to address asymmetric socio-political and economic relations between them, internal political division between both in Israel and Palestine and consequent difficulty to promote peace negotiations, and the significant impact of the remnant of colonial legacies and global and regional political dynamic on the protraction of conflict. With Azar's theoretical gaze, the research concludes that

more complex and holistic processes must be enacted than mere management of temporal cooperative events.

Brief history of the Israel-Palestine conflict

The Israel-Palestine conflict is caused by the struggle for the holy land. The land had been internationally known as Palestine. However, for Jewish people, the same land is the destination of the Zionist movement. The core tenet of the Zionist movement, which began in the late 19th century was that the only solution to anti-Semitism was the establishment of a Jewish state.¹ Since the early 20th century, the land became the spot for colonialist political games as the European powers such as the UK and France meddled in the region. In 1917, the British government expressed its support for the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine. In Palestinian eyes, the British policy to facilitate the establishment of a Jewish state means ignoring the historical fact that Palestinian people had lived in the land for generations and the social fragmentation of Palestinian society.² In 1928, there was a huge clash between Arabs and Jewish settlers over communal rights at the Wailing Wall that is one of the holy sites for both the Jewish and Muslim people. Between 1936 and 1939, there was a Palestinian revolt against British control and Zionist settlement, which was suppressed by the British and augmented by Zionist militias.³

After World War II, the UK relinquished its mandate over Palestine and requested the United Nations to handle Palestine. In 1947, considering the necessity to gratify the needs and demands of both Jews and Palestinian Arabs, the UN General Assembly voted to partition Palestine into two states – one for Jewish people and the other for Palestinians.⁴ While the Zionists accepted the UN plan, the Palestinian Arabs rejected it. In May 1948, after the proclamation of the State of Israel, the surrounding Arab states intervened, which escalated into interstate war. The war ended in 1949 with the signing

¹ See Bunton, M. *The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

² See Najjar, F. "The Question of Palestine," in *The Review of Politics*, vol. 42 no. 2, 1980, 604-610.

³ Bunton, 2013.

⁴ Ibid.

of Armistice Agreements between Israel and Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria. However, the Palestinians, the majority of whom were expelled from the war, were not party to the accords.⁵ As a result of the war, Palestine came to be divided into three parts – 77 percent of the territory for Israel, East Jerusalem and West Bank for Jordan, and the Gaza Strip for Egypt.⁶ On June 5, 1967, the war broke out between Israel, Egypt, Syria, and Jordan and ended with a victory of Israel. The victory allowed Israel to capture the West Bank from Jordan, the Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, and the Golan Heights from Syria.⁷

Israel built a military administration to govern the Palestinian residents of the West Bank and Gaza and permitted hundreds of thousands of Jewish citizens to move to the West Bank and Gaza,⁸ which was condemned as breaching international law by the UN Security Council. However, despite the condemnation, little effort to enforce international law or hold Israel accountable for the violation has been made. The Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip underwent significant economic and social transformation for the Palestinians in terms of social fragmentation, lack of economic development, and low level of education.⁹ In 1964, the Arab League established the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization), which was later taken over by Palestinians, and Yasser Arafat led the PLO between 1968 and 2004.

In 1978, following the Egyptian president Anwar Sadat's visit to Jerusalem in the previous year, the Camp David Accords were signed between Egypt and Israel mediated by the then-US president Jimmy Carter. However, though the peace framework between Egypt and Israel was enacted, the provision of autonomy for the Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip was not administered. The accords contributed nothing toward a final and just settlement especially for Palestinians as they fell short of their demands for self-determination and independence.¹⁰

⁵ See Barak, O. "The Failure of the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process, 1993-2000," in *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 42 no. 6, 2005, 719-736.

⁶ Bunton, 2013.

⁷ Barak, 2005.

⁸ Bunton, 2013.

⁹ Najjar, 1980

¹⁰ Ibid.

In December 1987, the first Intifada, the popular uprising by the Palestinian people in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip against Israeli occupation occurred. As widely known, the Palestinian people carried out massive demonstrations, general strikes, boycotts of Israeli products, and refusal to pay taxes. The first Intifada contributed to the path of peace negotiations known as the Oslo Accords.¹¹ Following the series of secret negotiations between Israel and the PLO in Oslo, Norway, in September 1993, they signed the Declaration of Principles in Washington, D.C. The declaration agreed on the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and Jericho, additional withdrawal from some parts of the West Bank, and the PLO's formation of a Palestinian Authority with self-governing powers in areas from which Israeli forces were redeployed.¹² However, the key issues including how far Israel would cede the territories, the future of the Israeli settlements, the status of Jerusalem, etc. were put aside from the accords.¹³ Israeli governments kept building new settlements in the occupied territories and expanding the existing settlements and the international community, especially, the US and Western countries did not stop the new settlements policies.¹⁴

In September 2000, due to the widespread disappointment of Palestinians with the failure of the Oslo peace processes, the authoritarian rule of Arafat's authority, and resentment against Ariel Sharon's visit to East Jerusalem, the second Intifada occurred.¹⁵ Israel responded with force to suppress the uprising and reoccupied the territories that had been under Palestinian administration. Further, more Jewish settlement constructions and the displacement of Palestinians were carried out.¹⁶ Between 2008 and 2021, Israel conducted four major offensives in the Gaza Strip, causing a large number of Palestinian casualties including children, destruction of civilian buildings including private homes, schools, and public offices.¹⁷ In 2008, the UN Security Council Resolution stressed the necessity of international and regional efforts to intensify a two-state

¹¹ See Elmali, B. *From Past to Present: The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*. Istanbul: TRT World Research Centre, 2024.

¹² Bunton, 2013.

¹³ Elmali, 2024.

¹⁴ Bunton, 2013.

¹⁵ Elmali, 2024.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

solution and end the protracted Israeli-Palestine conflict. 2016 UN Security Council Resolution reiterated a breach of international law by Israeli settlements in the West and East Jerusalem and urged a prompt halt to settlement. However, no coordinated measures by the international community have been taken to turn the spirits of the UN Resolutions into practice

While no substantial progress for the resolution of the conflict was achieved, the November 2022 election allowed Benjamin Netanyahu to return to power and lead a coalition of six right-wing and far-right parties that do not recognize the existence of the Palestinian population in Israeli territory.¹⁸ Nonproductive development of the resolution and deepening series of violence culminated in the October 7, 2023, Hamas attacks in Israel. The attacks and counter-military operations by Israel Defense Forces led to a high number of casualties in both Palestine and Israel including hostages by Hamas and civilian casualties in the Gaza Strip.¹⁹

Critique of liberal peacebuilding

Since the end of the Cold War, liberal peace thesis has assumed the core role in peacebuilding enterprise in both intellectual and practical terms.²⁰ Facing the necessity to address many armed conflicts in the post-Cold War era, the international community managed mainly by liberal states has connected peace and security with market-oriented development, democracy, rule of law, human rights based on individual liberty and freedom, a vigorous civil society, and stable central government state framework.²¹

Under the banner of ‘peace-as-governance,’ – the mixture of institutional regulation and liberal freedoms, it was believed that the achievement of stable peace relies on the reform of comprehensive frameworks for social, economic, political, and cultural regulation and

¹⁸ See Bassou, A. *Israel-Palestine: The Last Chance for a Just Solution*. Policy Center for the New South, 2023.

¹⁹ See Stamatopoulou-Robbins, S. *The Human Toll: Indirect Deaths from War in Gaza and the West Bank, October 7, 2023, Forward*. Watson Institute for International & Public Affairs, Brown University, 2024.

²⁰ See Richmond, O.P. *Peace: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

²¹ See Richmond, O. P. *The Transformation of Peace*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

governance by liberal external and internal actors working toward the same universal framework envisaged by the liberal peace thesis.²² Rather than reflecting local preferences and needs, the process of liberal peacebuilding is seen as the promotion or imposition of an external, hegemonic agenda that integrates peripheral areas into global norms of politics and economics.²³

Further, liberal peace has been founded upon the belief that there exists a socio-political and cultural-historical divide between the West and the non-West.²⁴ The critical problem with such belief in an ontological divide between the West and the non-West and epistemological superiority of the former is the failure to critique global political dynamics and legacies of colonialism as component of conflict or war. Liberal peace fails to examine how colonialism and global political dynamics mainly managed by the West contribute to prolonging the conflict and war. Structural violence, cultural violence, basic human needs issues, poverty, governance system, and international linkage and colonial legacies and their impacts on conflict and war, etc., need to be considered while respecting the merits of liberal peace. And critical appraisal of Edward Azar's Protracted Social Conflict theory will help us to broaden the purview of conflict analysis.

Analysis of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict from Edward Azar's Protracted Social Conflict Theory

What is Protracted Social Conflict?

Azar explains that protracted social conflict is "the prolonged and often violent struggle by communal groups for such needs as security, recognition and acceptance, fair access to political institutions, and economic participation."²⁵ The theory hypothesizes that there is a denial of the elements essential for the development of all people and societies and that the pursuit of them is an imperative

²² Ibid.

²³ Richmond, O. P. *A Post-Liberal Peace*. London: Routledge, 2011.

²⁴ See Sabaratnam, M. "Avatars of Eurocentrism in the Critique of the Liberal Peace," in *Security Dialogue*, vol. 44 no. 3, 2013, 259-278.

²⁵ See Azar, E. "The Analysis and Management of protracted Conflict" in *The Psychodynamics of International Relations Volume Two: Unofficial Diplomacy at Work*, Volkan, V. D., Montville, J V., and Julius, D. A. (eds), 1991, 3, Massachusetts: Lexington.

need for people.²⁶ Protracted social conflicts are understood as a violent conflict that involves enduring features such as economic and technological underdevelopment, and unintegrated social and political systems.²⁷

We can see that Azar's Protracted Social Conflict view applies to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As Bayeh argues, the Israel-Palestine conflict dates back to the Biblical era with the competing claim over land forming the core of the long-lasting conflict.²⁸ Throughout the 20th century, Palestine was under the control of colonial powers and hegemonic forces including the Israeli occupation of the part of the disputed land, which was followed by catastrophe or An-Nakba in 1948.²⁹ In 1967, another catastrophe or Al-Nakba occurred with the result of the loss of entire Palestinian lands to the Israeli occupation.³⁰ Since then, the Palestinian community engaged in popular resistance through both armed and unarmed resistance strategies,³¹ while Israel responded with forces to suppress resistance, which culminated in the 2023 October 7 Hamas raids in Israel and Israel's military operations in Gaza in the aftermath of the raids.

Analysis of four variables of protracted social conflict

Azar's theory has four variables as its core components: communal content; human needs; governance and the role of the state; and international linkages.

First component

The first component is the communal content of a society. In protracted social conflict, a key actor is a communal group, such as

²⁶ See Azar, E. "Protracted Social Conflicts: Ten Propositions," in *International Interactions*, vol. 12 no. 1, 1985, 59-70.

²⁷ Azar, 1991.

²⁸ See Bayeh, E. "The Current War on Gaza: A Challenge to the Principle of 'The Responsibility to Protect,'" in *International Journal of Political Science and Development*, vol. 2 no. 9, 2014, 205-210.

²⁹ See Yousef, A. and Ozcelik, S. "Palestine: Reconciliation and Peacebuilding. Perspectives from the Civil Society Organizations," in *Conflict Studies Quarterly*, vol. 35, 2021, 89-109.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

religious, racial, cultural, and so on.³² Azar critiques that most nation-states in the contemporary international system are unintegrated, artificially grouped, or bounded, and cannot consolidate a civic culture.³³ Since Westphalia, nation-states have been the core of the international system, which has sustained the belief in sovereignty and independence as instruments of control over the people within the bounded territory.³⁴

However, a more immediate communal identity that sharpens awareness of a close bond between people of similar culture, language, religion, beliefs, customs, and habitual life perspectives tends to be more important than national identity. The immediate communal groups are a natural outcome of an individual's need to construct a sensible reality and to belong to others who share similar realities.³⁵ The salience of the immediate communal social identity does not deny nation-state and state identity per se. However, in protracted social conflicts, communal social identity is more powerful than the nation-state identity.

Though it can be understood that Israeli identity revolves around national identity, it is also combined with religious one – Jewish, Islam, Christian, etc. Since Palestinians have not yet achieved an independent state, we can understand their core identity would be an immediate communal identity based on Islam. The communal content has assumed a central role in the Israel-Palestine conflict. The Palestinians have believed their land underpinning their identity had been stolen by Israel. Israel sees the land as something that was given by God. In the mixture of immediate communal identity, holy land, and existential threat, Palestinians and Israelis have been locked into long-standing cycles of negatively defined interaction.

Second component

Second, Azar argues that protracted social conflicts are over fundamental basic human needs including identity, social recognition,

³² Azar, 1991.

³³ Azar, 1985.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

social justice, and security.³⁶ Abraham Maslow, claiming that humanity has fundamental basic needs, developed a hierarchy of needs: “physiological needs;” “safety needs;” “belongingness and love needs;” “esteem needs;” and “need for self-actualization.”³⁷ Paul Sites insists people – whether as individuals or as a group – are often willing to behave outside socially accepted rules in order to gratify basic needs.³⁸

John Burton hypothesized that the needs most essential to understanding protracted conflict are those for identity, social recognition, social justice, fair development, and security in both physical and psychological terms.³⁹ Those needs are fundamental motivations and they will be pursued by all means available because, from an ontological point of view, individuals or groups of individuals are conditioned by an intrinsic drive to pursue those needs.⁴⁰ Burton made a distinction between needs that are non-negotiable since they are primordial drives for survival and development; and interests that are negotiable.⁴¹ Burton also insists since protracted conflict is mainly over non-negotiable fundamental needs, coercive means, superficial conflict settlement, or bargaining in which asymmetric power relations and unequal socio-political structure decide the outcome cannot guarantee a sustainable peace.⁴²

Israel’s needs

For both Jews and Palestinians, needs for identity and security are vital and have remained unfulfilled.⁴³ From the Israeli perspective, Israelis have suffered the threat of their existence since the Exodus, which culminated in the Holocaust.⁴⁴ For Israel, their fundamental

³⁶ See Azar, E. *The Management of Protracted Social Conflict: Theory and Practice*. Aldershot: Dartmouth, 1990.

³⁷ See Maslow, A. *Motivation and personality*, 1970, 36-46, New York: Harper and Low.

³⁸ See Sites, P. *Control: The Basis of Social Order*. New York: Dunellen, 1973.

³⁹ See Burton, J. “The History of International Conflict Resolution.” in *International Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice*, Azar, E. and Burton, J. (eds), 1986, 40-55, Sussex: Wheatsheaf.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ See Burton, J. *Conflict: Resolution and Prevention*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Barak, 2005.

⁴⁴ Yousef and Ozelik, 2021

need for existence and preservation of identity should be protected by any means available including war. In the contemporary world, the Jewish people are still fighting for their right to exist and maintain their identity.⁴⁵ The preservation of a Jewish-majority state is a fundamental existential concern for the majority of Israeli Jews.⁴⁶

Therefore, Israel has taken a strong position against those who professed hatred against the Jews. The Holy Land, the setting for war and violence during the Middle Ages, provides not only the background but also the *raison d'être* for the present war on Gaza, which was started by Hamas on October 7 when they attacked Israel, murdering more than a thousand innocent civilians, raping women, butchering the old, and beheading babies. In an Israeli eye, what Hamas did was a form of racial violence and ethnic cleansing as they clearly targeted Israeli civilians who had no means to defend themselves.

Palestinian's needs

While Israeli's existential need for security and identity must be acknowledged, the Palestinians' also must be recognized. The most complex component of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the contested holy city of Jerusalem.⁴⁷ For Palestinians, Jerusalem is the symbol of their sovereignty and identity albeit Israel finds it difficult to completely hand over the city to the Palestinians since it represents a historical link between the Jewish and their homeland.⁴⁸ However, what should be acknowledged is that the Palestinians have suffered the failure to gratify a variety of basic human needs in asymmetric relations with Israel. While Palestinians want to feel secure and exercise their sovereignty since it is the way to achieve recognition for their identity on a global scale, with the Israeli military forces on the

⁴⁵ See Halborn, H. *A Modern History of Germany*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969.

⁴⁶ See Kelman, H. C. "A One-Country/Two-State Solution to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," in *Middle East Policy*, vol. XVIII no. I, 2011, 27-41.

⁴⁷ See Padhila, I. Pratiwi., Syarafi, A. R., M., and Nauvarian, D. "Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Beyond Resolution: A Critical Assessment," in *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik*, vol. 26 no. 2, 2022, 168-182.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

ground for a long time, Palestinians have thought they are under Israel's rule and feel threatened in every aspect of their daily lives.⁴⁹

In reality, the Palestinians have been blighted with the existential threat by Israel as it adopted the massacre of civilians as a state policy many times since 1948. The Deir Yassin Massacre which took place on April 9, 1948, was a significant event during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and led to the creation of the State of Israel.⁵⁰ During the massacre, a large number of Palestinian villagers including women, children, and the elderly were killed and the massacre played a key role in the Palestinian Arab exodus (Nakba), as many Palestinians were forced to flee their homes due to the violence and the fear of extinction.⁵¹

Apart from existential threat, many Palestinians have suffered socio-political and economic hardships. For instance, the scarcity of water resources and unequal access to water is one of the critical socio-economic problems between the Israelis and the Palestinians. A core aspect of the water problem lies in the unequal distribution of water since Israel has developed advanced water infrastructure and technology that allows effective management of its water supply while Palestinians need to grapple with water scarcity because of insufficient infrastructure, and restrictions on drilling wells.⁵² The water issue also carries political implications as Israel has occupied the West Bank and Gaza Strip and regulated Palestinians' access to water, which damaged their agricultural development and economic growth. High employment rates of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip have caused economic instability.⁵³ The Palestinians have been dependent on Israel which controls all their land and water resources as well as basic services including electricity, and telephones.⁵⁴

In 1987, the First Intifada erupted with large-scale mass participation in which young Palestinians participated to protest the systematic Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, which caused socio-political and economic sufferings, the collective

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Elmali, 2024.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Barak, 2005.

aspiration for self-determination in those occupied areas.⁵⁵ In September 2000, the Second Intifada occurred. One of the main causes of the Second Intifada can be traced to the visit of Ariel Sharon to East Jerusalem.⁵⁶ After his visit, a demonstration erupted, and Israeli forces responded with violence. The two Intifadas can be understood as the protests against the sufferings of the Palestinians under the Israeli occupation and control and asymmetric relations, which caused the Palestinians' failure to fulfill their basic needs for social justice, social recognition, and self-esteem. Sharon's visit to East Jerusalem could be seen as a symbol of threat or even humiliation to the Palestinians' identity and security. According to Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, Hamas acknowledged that they committed the raids in Israel in order to change the paradigm in Palestine.⁵⁷ Hamas claimed that returning to the previous status quo without discussing and addressing the underlying causes of the conflict – the long-term Israeli occupation and consequent socio-political and economic hardships that the Palestinians have suffered – cannot be acceptable.⁵⁸

The grievances and resistances against Israel emerged from desperation and anger, which derived from unendurable socio-political and economic living conditions under Israeli occupation. While we need to acknowledge the hardships and existential threat Jewish people suffered in their history, they tend to overlook the Palestinian side of the history of hardships, miseries, and unfulfilled basic needs in many terms.

Third component

Third, Azar argues that the state is provided with the authority to govern and use force when necessary to regulate society, protect citizens, and provide collective goods, and the extent of gratification or deprivation of basic human needs is affected by the state.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Yousef and Ozelik, 2021.

⁵⁶ Bunton, 2013.

⁵⁷ See Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs. *The Gaza War and the Regional Turmoil in the Middle East*, 2024.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Azar, 1991.

In many protracted social conflicts, political inequality can be seen as the asymmetric distribution of political power among different communal identity groups.⁶⁰ The asymmetric access to political power is related to economic disparities in income, wealth, and status.⁶¹ In protracted social conflict underpinned by structural inequality, ideology legitimizes the unequal access to political and economic power among communal groups, favoring a particular sector or group and even attempting to stabilize and sustain the asymmetric socio-political and economic structure by disguising the resulting inequalities as natural or pre-given.⁶² Structural injustice undergirded by asymmetric political power relations is manifested in the form of economic deprivation of an individual or group, producing chronic poverty and the failure to secure an acceptable level of the physiological, psychological, and relational quality of life including basic needs such as food, housing basic medical care, and proper education.⁶³ Under such an asymmetric governance structure and consequent deprivation of socio-political, economic, and psychological basic needs, hostile and violent actions and interactions between the state or those in power and the marginalized flare up.⁶⁴ Through the mobilization of group interests and identities by ruling elites and the reactive counter-identification of excluded groups, conflict comes to be protracted.⁶⁵

While Azar's theory is associated with internal conflict, the Israel-Palestinian conflict is not to be categorized as an internal one. However, as discussed earlier, asymmetric relations between the Israeli government and Palestine represented by Israel's occupation of the Gaza Strip and West Bank along with the building of walls caused the failure of Palestinians' fulfillment of basic human needs including socio-political and economic ones, leading to their failure to achieve

⁶⁰ See Azar, E. and Moon, C. "Managing Protracted Social Conflicts in the Third World: Facilitation and Development Diplomacy," in *Millennium Journal of International Studies*, vol. 15 no. 3, 1986, 393-406.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ See Azar, E. "The Theory of Protracted Social Conflict and the Challenge of Transforming Conflict Situations," in *Monograph Series in World Affairs*, vol. 20 no. 2, 1983, 81-99.

⁶⁵ See Ramsbotham, O. "The analysis of protracted social conflict: a tribute to Edward Azar," in *Review of International Studies*, vol. 31, 2005, 109-126.

security and identity needs. However, besides their asymmetric governance relations and consequent unfulfilled basic human needs, each internal political problem needs to be understood. Here, it would be worth examining the internal political and governing problems of Israel and Palestine.

Israel

A critical internal political issue in Israel is the Netanyahu coalition government. The survival of Netanyahu's government depends on right-wing and religious parties that limit the purview of political maneuvers to resolve the conflict.⁶⁶ The main doctrine of far-right parties and religious parties is to empty Palestine of its population and turn it into Israeli territory. They encourage Netanyahu to take any measures available in his power to ensure that there will never be a Palestinian state.⁶⁷ Hard-line parties and groups underpinning Netanyahu's government interpret the two-state solution as a concession that would contradict Israel's national interest as their focus is on an expansionist agenda.⁶⁸ The settlement movement against the Palestinian population is undergirded by the Israeli legal system and bureaucracy, making the Israeli-Palestinian conflict much more asymmetric and protracted at the expense of Palestinian residents.⁶⁹

As Bassou points out, the October 7 raids by Hamas occurred in a period of unprecedented political instability in Israel itself, which is demonstrated by socio-political divisions that endanger not only Israeli democracy but its social cohesion.⁷⁰ Netanyahu's plan to seize the reins of justice and judiciary from the executive branch of government inflamed the Israeli people and caused protests even within the ranks of the military.⁷¹ The division between those who supported Netanyahu and those against his coalition became significant, putting national unity in jeopardy. In the aftermath of the Hamas's raids, Netanyahu standing in front of possible criminal cases,

⁶⁶ Kelman, 2011.

⁶⁷ Bassou, 2023.

⁶⁸ Elmali, 2024.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Bassou, 2023.

⁷¹ Ibid.

went into his own political survival mode and whipped up for counter-military operations as an existential war for Israel.⁷² Raising the banner of existential war for Israel, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) were deployed to terminate Hamas within a strategic vacuum devoid of any long-term political solution to the root cause of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, that is, occupation and consequent human miseries and unfulfilled socio-political and economic needs of the Palestinians.⁷³

Voices of the Israeli people concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are diverse. However, the structure of Netanyahu's coalition government and his own political maneuvers allow his government to ignore such multiple voices of the Israeli people and try to approach the conflict and military operations in Gaza without looking into asymmetric relations between Israel and Palestine, which causes the failure to fulfill socio-political and economic needs of Palestinians.

Palestine

While internal political problems in Israel make the conflict intractable and difficult to resolve, we can find the internal political struggles within Palestine hamper the progress of conflict resolution. As Yousef and Ozcelik explain, Palestinian politics revolved around two major parties – Fatah, or the Palestinian Liberation Movement, and Hamas, or the Islamic Resistance Movement – which have different ideologies in dealing with the conflict with Israel.⁷⁴ The Palestinian Authority was established in 1994 in the aftermath of the Oslo Accords in order to play the governing role in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

However, the Palestinian Authority has focused on the widespread use of money and political influence to buy elites and prevent the rise of criticisms of the authority.⁷⁵ Intellectual elites and writers are co-opted by the Authority which offers them posts in the government as ministers, deputy ministers, or overseas

⁷² See Krieg, A. "The war in Gaza, the decline of US leadership and the emergence of a networked regional order" in *Mediterranean Politics*, 2024, 1-10.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Yousef and Ozcelik, 2021.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

ambassadors.⁷⁶ Due to its political games and failure to respond to the needs of the Palestinian people, the Palestinian Authority could not function as a governing body in the Gaza Strip after Israel's disengagement from the territory in 2005 and ended up facing the problems of corruption, cronyism, weak economy, and high unemployment rates.⁷⁷

Under such a situation, in 2006, Hamas won the parliamentary elections. In June 2007, after six days of fighting, the armed forces of Hamas took control over Gaza from the Authority. The Authority President Mahmoud Abbas rejected the Hamas-led government and founded an emergency cabinet led by Prime Minister Salem Fayyad in the West Bank.⁷⁸

Originally the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas was founded in 1987 during the First Intifada. Initially, Hamas took up non-violent solutions and even made peace proposals including dialogues with Israeli leaders, emphasizing an independent Palestinian state founded upon equal rights and the principles of sovereignty.⁷⁹ However, the catastrophic losses of Palestinian people in the Intifada combined with severe acts of violence by Israeli forces drove Hamas to resort to armed resistance to protect Palestinians as it came to insist that there is no other solution than armed struggle against Israel, which seems to have underpinned their raids in Israel on October 7, 2023. However, its extremist behavior deprives the Hamas of certain support within the international community.⁸⁰ Many demonstrations denouncing Israeli forces' excessive violence in Gaza expressed support for the Palestinian people, but few applauded the Hamas's raids.⁸¹

While long-lasting asymmetric political relations between Israel and Palestine have hampered the resolution of the conflict, each internal political and government problem has also contributed to the failure to pave the way for conflict resolution.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Bunton, 2013.

⁷⁹ Elmali, 2024.

⁸⁰ Bassou, 2023.

⁸¹ Ibid.

Fourth component

Fourth, according to Azar, the formation of domestic socio-political and economic institutions and values and their effect on the role of the state is heavily influenced by the patterns of linkage with the international system.⁸² Economic dependency within the international economic system distorts the pattern of economic development, which hampers the gratification of a variety of basic human needs.⁸³

The linkage with the international system is also connected to colonialism. The disjunction between state governance and society in many parts of the world is attributed to a colonial legacy that artificially imposed the Western ideas of territorial statehood onto a variety of communal groups on the principle of divide and rule, which did not necessarily properly reflect communal identity groups' ideal visions of good governance.⁸⁴ As many post-colonialists point out, the impact of colonialism remains in the existing global socio-political and economic dynamics, which affects many conflicts and wars including Israel-Palestine, Syria, and Yemen, to name a few. Many conflicts that had been caused by colonial legacies and asymmetric global politico-economic structures invite the intervention of great powers, complicating even further the relationships of those powers, and aggravating the already difficult communal relationships in each protracted social conflict situation.⁸⁵

Colonialism impact

Throughout the last century, Palestine was under the control of colonial powers and hegemonic forces. In the early 20th century, Palestine became a troubled spot of competing territorial claims and political interests. The European powers, especially, the UK and France, entrenched their grip on areas in the eastern Mediterranean including Palestine. During the First World War, the Allied Powers, France, Britain, and the US, found themselves at a stalemate against

⁸² Azar, 1990.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ramsbotham 2005.

⁸⁵ Azar, 1985.

the Central Powers, Germany, Austria, and the Ottoman Empire.⁸⁶ During 1915 and 1916, Sir Henry MacMahon, the then-British High Commissioner in Egypt, persuaded Husayn Ali to lead an Arab revolt against the Ottoman Empire aligned with Germany, promising the British government support for the establishment of an independent Arab state under Hashemite family rule in the Arab provinces of the Empire including Palestine.⁸⁷ The UK and France struck a deal to carve up the Arab provinces of the Empire and divide the control of the region, which allowed the UK to obtain a mandate over the areas comprising Israel, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and Jordan.⁸⁸

The 1917 Belfour Declaration announced the British government's support for the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine. The League of Nations mandate recognized the historical connection of Jews to Palestine and entrusted Britain with the administration of Palestine to facilitate the foundation of a Jewish national home.⁸⁹ Even the 1947 UN Partition Plan that gave a legal basis to build Israel with the recommendation of the division of Palestine into Jewish and Arab states can be understood as a colonial legacy that fails to respect the history of Palestinians who had lived in the land for centuries. A series of those political dynamics implied that despite the clear Arab population, Palestine is considered land that belongs to no one. This narrative resonated with the motivations underpinning colonization movements in 15th-century Europe and had been exploited as legitimizing ground by the British Empire.⁹⁰ Revolving around the European-originated colonial narrative, the Zionist narrative initiated the statehood movement in Palestine to bring about civilization in a backward and primitive land.⁹¹

Colonial power failed to respect the identity of the Palestinian people for their politico-economic interests. The League of Nations and the United Nations sought to resolve the Palestine problems and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, their resolutions and mandates seem to have failed to be immune from the colonial mentality of the West. The colonial powers, while trying to manipulate

⁸⁶ Halborn 1969.

⁸⁷ Bunton, 2013.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Elmali, 2024.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

the Arabs to side with them to win the First World War, dictated Israel's right to dominate the Palestinians' homeland. These colonial motivations have also impacted post-second World War dynamics in the region, which continues to affect the existing Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Influence of international political dynamics

Apart from colonial legacies, contemporary international political dynamics also contributed to making the Israeli-Palestinian conflict protracted. Though the 2020 Plan for Peace and Prosperity was proposed by then-US President Trump and Netanyahu, the proposed solutions were biased towards Israel and drafted without Palestinian input.⁹² The Trump Peace Plan ignored any Palestinian input and presented the transfer of the US Embassy to Jerusalem. The Peace Plan gave Israel a blank cheque for the annexation of disputed territories while pushing Palestine to cease military action and desist from supporting terrorism.⁹³ The plan never considered the root causes of the conflict and showed no intention to address asymmetric relations between Israel and Palestine.

Further, on October 7 Hamas's attack pushed the US to move away from a diplomatic position to take the primary role in regional conflict by increasing its arms supplies to Israel and stressing its strong support for Israel by continuing to oppose a ceasefire in Gaza.⁹⁴ During the first half of 2024, as the world witnessed the large-scale humanitarian crises in Gaza, the US government increased criticism of Israel's military operations.⁹⁵ However, the US government continued military support for Israel. As of August 2024, President Biden's order of military support resulted in about 500 aircraft deliveries and 107 sea shipments to Israel over 50,000 tons of munitions and weapons systems.⁹⁶ The Biden administration also notified the US Congress of five potential Foreign Military Sales to Israel for over \$20 billion.⁹⁷

⁹² Padhila, Syarafi, and Nauvarian, 2022.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, 2024.

⁹⁵ See Zanotti, J. and Sharp, J. M. *Israel and Hamas Conflict in Brief: Overview, U.S. Policy, and Options for Congress*. 2024, Congressional Research Service.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

While the inconsistencies of the US Middle East policy contribute to prolonging the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and failing to stop the humanitarian crises in Gaza, other Western countries have shown a lack of political will to act upon the UN Security Council resolutions including resolutions 242, 338, 1397, which called for a two-state solution.⁹⁸ The quick decision of the US, the UK, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, and the Netherlands to defund UNRWA on alleged Israeli accusations of 12 UNRWA staff members involved in the October 7 raids, has undermined the ICJ ruling that demanded an immediate increase of humanitarian aid in Gaza, laying bare the one-sided approach to the Gaza war.⁹⁹ Though the possible involvement of UNRWA staff in the attacks cannot be tolerated, humanitarian crises and human miseries caused by military operations cannot be ignored. In 2005, the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) was adopted at the UN Summit. The principle stipulates that the international community will not be a mute bystander of people's tragedy and misery for the reason of state sovereignty.¹⁰⁰ The Gaza war has caused grave humanitarian catastrophes. While saving Israeli hostages is necessary, an international collective response to humanitarian catastrophes hitting Palestinian people in Gaza is also a human-moral imperative.

A series of events in the Middle East including the Gaza crisis have been developing in a deepening fragmentation of the international order, which transformed from a unipolar world to a multipolar one. And since the war in Ukraine in February 2022, China and Russia have been challenging the dominance of the US globally and regionally.¹⁰¹ Besides, regional powers such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, etc., have tried to take on a prominent role in the Middle East. However, it is also clear that despite huge public pressure from their population to show solidarity with the Palestinians in Gaza, the governments in the Middle Eastern regions have never taken the initiative to bring an end to the Gaza crisis. Rather, it seems they have also been engaged in political games in dealing with Israel. In short, in

⁹⁸ Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs. 2024.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Bayeh, 2014.

¹⁰¹ Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, 2024.

either unipolar dynamics or multipolar dynamics, the plights of Palestinians in Gaza have failed to be put at the center of politics.

Since the rise of the Palestine problems in the early 20th century, the underlying socio-political, economic, and post-colonial issues, especially, the Palestinian hardships and struggles have never been put at the center of the international arena. Even the UN partition two-state solution resolutions have remained to be enacted. The rapprochement proposals made since the early 20th century onwards are symptomatic of the lack of humane visions for the Palestinians. We have yet to witness the rise of a shared regional vision for a peaceful and constructive Middle East.

Concluding Remarks

This research has examined the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from the perspectives of Edward Azar's Protracted Social Conflict. Azar's insights show that the protraction of conflict could flourish in any environment of severe politico-economic underdevelopment, structural injustice, and colonial legacies.¹⁰² Prolonged antagonistic intergroup interactions need to be understood and approached in the interlocking nexus of underdevelopment, structural deprivation of socio-political and economic opportunities, communal or social cleavages, the failure of basic human needs, and the remnant of colonial legacies and global political dynamics.¹⁰³ Any approaches that do not come to grip such complex and interlocking causes and dynamics tend to rest on coercive power control and superficial compromise. Though tension reduction measures make the conflict more bearable in the short term, far more complex and holistic processes than mere management of temporal cooperative events need to be enacted.¹⁰⁴

As illustrated, the fulfillment of basic human needs for both Israel and Palestine are vital. As discussed, Israel's fundamental security need must enjoy international recognition beyond its Western allies and its friendly states. However, as examined, at the bottom of the long-endured Israeli-Palestinian conflict lies asymmetric relations between Israel and Palestine and consequent historical

¹⁰² Azar and Moon, 1986.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Azar, 1985.

failure to gratify Palestinians' basic human needs including the need for the recognition of its national status, need for justice in socio-political and economic terms, and need for physical and psychological security. Though Hamas's radical acts need to be condemned, the sustenance of social injustice and consequent lack of basic physical and psychological needs would contribute to producing similar radical behaviors. Though the plan for a two-state solution is getting formidable after the October 7 Hamas's attack and Israeli forces' counter-military operations, achieving Palestinians' self-determination assumes a core role in paving the way for enhancing their security needs and socio-political and economic needs.

Regarding the governance problems, in order to overcome asymmetric relations, the establishment of an independent Palestine state would be crucial. However, as analyzed, internal political problems, both in Israel and Palestine need to be addressed. In Israeli politics, the conservative Netanyahu government has pivoted to the far-right that empowers the illegal settlement movement, and dehumanizing Palestinians living under Israeli occupation.¹⁰⁵ In Palestine, Hamas is doomed to the same fate as the Israeli right and far-right, believing that one needs to eradicate the other.¹⁰⁶ Besides, the deep division between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority damages the progress of peace negotiations. Highly self-righteous and hardline political views prevent both sides from exploring wider possibilities of compromise as a first step for peace and of long-term visions for a lasting peace.

As Kelman suggests, to explore the possibilities for overcoming asymmetric political dynamics between Israel and Palestine and for long-term political negotiation, both Israel and Palestine need leadership that will accommodate a visionary approach that transcends the power politics and radical spectrum.¹⁰⁷ Visionary and exploratory leaders need to recognize that in a profound conflict that involves national identity and national existence, only an integrative, win-win strategy can create a solution.¹⁰⁸ With visionary leadership, a historic compromise that meets the fundamental needs of both

¹⁰⁵ Krieg, 2024.

¹⁰⁶ Bassou, 2023.

¹⁰⁷ Kelman, 2011.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

peoples and validates mutual national identities and social justice for the Palestinians could be made.

Creating such visionary leadership requires both Israel and Palestine to strengthen political pluralism in terms of the diversity of values and visions, and public reasoning among various political parties including right, left, and middle, etc. As Yousef and Ozcelik argue, the real peace process in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict needs to integrate the bottom-up – civil society, grassroots – activities, and top-down – governmental and formal – peace negotiations.¹⁰⁹ The collaborations between the Palestinian and Israeli people are critical for the basic motivation of lasting peace.¹¹⁰ To that end, addressing internal political division and the enhancement of civil society and grassroots empowerment would be of great importance.

Finally, as argued, we need to acknowledge that colonial legacies and current global and regional political dynamics are also responsible for the Israeli-Palestine socio-political and economic asymmetric relations and their confrontational dynamics. States behave according to national interest(s), which affects the UN's failure to pave the way for a ceasefire in Gaza or to make Israel even temporarily suspend military operations for humanitarian assistance to Palestinians in Gaza. However, the condition of the UN reflects the condition of global confrontational and divisive political dynamics between the West and the non-West, between different allied groups, between global powers, or between global and regional powers. Unless those dynamics are changed even temporarily, there is no prospect for suspension of crisis, provision of physical basic needs would be almost impossible.

International pressure will have to be brought to bear to make the Israeli right-wing and its far-right appendages aware that their hardline policies cause threats to the security of the Israeli people.¹¹¹ However, at the same time, global and regional powers need to make a historic compromise to persuade Hamas to release the remaining hostages. Especially, regional powers supporting Hamas and other radical groups for ideological and strategic reasons should know that their support is also contributing to the sufferings of civilian Palestinians in Gaza, which is morally unacceptable. Any form of

¹⁰⁹ Yousef and Ozcelik, 2021.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Bassou, 2023.

compromise must be explored. This is a highly superficial and temporal solution to the crises. However, in the long-term vision, the international community needs to create a favorable socio-political and economic environment that helps Palestinians to enjoy the satisfaction of basic human needs including social justice and social recognition and a physical and psychological sense of security since that would be one of the most contributory approaches to prevent the radicalism. It means that global powers including the US, Russia, and regional powers including Iran, Saudia Arabia, and Israel need to change their conventional confrontational direction. It sounds like almost utopian thinking. However, in Azar's view, the complex interconnection of communal, local, inter-state, global, and colonial dynamics of the conflict need to be reformulated. The Israeli-Palestinian peacebuilding requires multiple perspectives and solutions with complex thinking as well as cognitive, behavioral, and affective changes on multiple levels from interpersonal to global.¹¹²

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¹¹² Yousef and Ozcelik, 2021.

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